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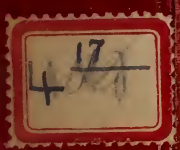

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

CHANNING.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT

COVENTRY, NORTHAMPTON,

AND WARWICK.

BY

JOHN GORDON.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

A DISCOURSE

ON OCCASION OF THE

DEATH OF THE LATE DR. CHANNING,

DELIVERED IN THE

GREAT MEETING-HOUSE, COVENTRY,

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1842,

AND RE-DELIVERED

AT NORTHAMPTON AND WARWICK.

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BY

JOHN GORDON.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

Some to higher hopes
Were destin'd; some within a finer mould
She wrought, and temper'd with a purer flame:
To these the Sire Omnipotent unfolds
The world's harmonious volume, there to read
The transcript of Himself.—AKENSIDE.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED BY JOHN GREEN, NEWGATE STREET;
AND
E. CARTER, COVENTRY.
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E. CARTER,
PRINTER, HIGH-STREET,
COVENTRY.

DISCOURSE.

"MANY SHALL REJOICE AT HIS BIRTH."—*Luke* i. 14.

DEATH, we are told, levels all distinctions: and it does so, as far as its empire extends. But there are some things exempted from its dominion, and over which it has no power. Truth and goodness cannot die. They possess an "incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever." The destiny of the world is accomplished by the continued growth of that seed through the successive periods of history. It is the ordinance of heaven that men should be raised up from time to time, whose especial work it is to sow this immortal seed. God does not trust this work to the ordinary operations of the human mind alone. There are minds which he constitutes for its distinctive performance, and with whose efforts particular departments of truth and goodness become identified. The men who are thus chosen from the rest are the great benefactors of the race. They are felt and acknowledged to be such; and the immortality which belongs to the objects they accomplish is also connected with their names and characters. Death, instead of destroying their influence, perpetuates and enlarges it.

To one of these men I am about to call your attention on this occasion. I do not hesitate to say

that, in my judgment, Dr. Channing was one of the master spirits of his age. His influence has been felt in this country, as well as in America, to an almost universal extent; and it has continued rapidly to increase since it began to operate. There are, I would fain believe, few, if any, hearts in this assembly which have not been warmed by his burning eloquence—which have not been strengthened and elevated by the lofty principles he propounded. He is dead. Though I had no personal knowledge of him, his death, when I heard of it, affected me as would that of a dear and intimate friend; for it was one of the prerogatives of his genius to create in those who were conversant with it, an ardent affection for himself. I am not here to lament his death. An infinitely wise and gracious providence, to whose appointments we unmurmuringly submit, ordained that it should occur. I am here to draw instruction and improvement from it as best I may. It leads us most naturally to review his *character*, and to recal to mind the *principles* to whose advocacy he devoted his life. To those points I shall confine myself.

I. Being unacquainted with Dr. Channing personally, I shall say nothing of his private character, but that I have always understood it to have been the counterpart of the mingled greatness and goodness which shine forth in his literary productions. It is to the character developed in those productions that I shall exclusively address myself. I will mention what seem to me some of its most prominent features.

1. The first mental characteristic which I shall notice as attaching to him is, the disposition he had to concern himself mainly, if not exclusively, with the principles of a subject.

His mind grasped the essential points on the questions with which he had to do, and he invariably endeavoured to resolve those questions by an appeal to the cardinal truths with which they might be identified. He troubled himself but little with arguments which merely suited the case in hand, but addressed himself to those arguments which would equally apply to all other similar cases. He was not careful to meet each separate detail of his subject, but contented himself with enforcing the great ideas to whose law all such details were subservient. He put aside the considerations which immediately related to party interests, and dwelt only upon those interests which were of universal bearing.

This attention to principle will appear the more remarkable, when we remember that much of what he wrote was occasioned by the current questions of the day—the American abolition movement—the annexation of Texas to the United States—the formation of organised associations—the case of the Creole. Another man would have regarded these things only according to their individual merits, *they* being the matters of general discussion; but Channing traced them all up to their fountain truths, and thus gave to their discussion an elevation correspondent to the superiority of his own mind.

This mental tendency affords the chief reason

for that frequent repetition of important truths which we meet with in his works. It will be found on examination, not to be a repetition of mere sentiment, but a new application of an essential principle.

If there be anything distinctive of a great man, it is the characteristic to which I am now alluding. The power of combination which it developes, the acuteness of insight which it implies, place him to whom it belongs far above his fellows. Nor is such a characteristic less promotive of the influence of its possessor, than it is distinctive of his greatness. It gives a breadth of application to the truth he may advocate, which secures for it a constant utility. To the tracts to which I have referred, though professedly relating only to the current questions of the day, men, who take but little interest in those questions themselves, turn for the benefit of the great principles they imbody, and will continue to turn even when those questions have lost the interest which they now possess.

2. Another mental characteristic belonging to the subject of my remarks is, the great strength and fulness of thought by which he was distinguished.

There was nothing like feebleness in his utterance of the principles to which he directed his attention. As delivered by him they possessed a clearness of substance, and definiteness of form, which proved that they stood to him in the relation of truth. They breathed a vital freshness which showed that the truth he had embraced was *his own*, being animated by the original exercise of his mind

upon it; and they assumed a weight and enlargement of sentiment which indicated the more than ordinary intellectual force with which they were conceived and applied. No one can read a page of his writings without seeing not only that he was sincere and earnest, but that the depth of his conviction, and the energy of his zeal, were such as can only be produced by a great expenditure of thought upon the point in hand. He carries along lesser minds by the mere power which he infuses into his opinions. He delivers no half-truths. He speaks in no faltering language. He permits no mistake as to his meaning. He manifests no indifference as to his conclusions. He produces the impression he wishes to produce in its most palpable form. His views are free from ambiguity, and must either be wholly accepted or wholly rejected. His influence is incalculably assisted by the unwonted vigour he infuses into his appeals.

All this is especially evident when he has to insist upon common truths — truths universally known and acknowledged. In his hands they appear new and original, and are armed with a strength which they were not seen to possess before. If, as it has been said,—if it be "the highest prerogative of genius to produce the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues admitted truths from the neglect caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission*," Channing possessed such genius in its greatest degree. To this strength and fulness of thought we must also, in some

* Coleridge,—*Aids to Reflection.*

measure, attribute the reiteration of principle on his part, to which I before referred. His principles were dwelt upon again and again, and made to resolve a variety of questions, because the vast power with which they acted upon his mind seemed to have drawn all its exercises into themselves. It was no lack of thought, but a superabundance of thought, which caused the reiteration.

3. Another feature of Dr. Channing's character is, the great mental activity which he displayed.

No one can turn over his writings without remarking the frequency with which he came before the public, and the variety of subjects to which his literary efforts related. As an eloquent and powerful preacher he occupied the first position in his country, and a large part of what he wrote referred directly to the religious topics, the discussion of which constituted the chief business of his life. But his writings were not by any means exclusively professional, although everything he composed was deeply tinged with the religious character which became his official station. He seems to have neglected no opportunity of delivering and enforcing the great truths with which his mind was fraught. And yet he was as far as possible removed from a hackneyed writer—one whose busy temper would lead him to concern himself with every question as a matter of course. He never stepped forward but when he had sentiments of high importance to communicate, or when there was some pressing want which he only could supply. He appears to have been forced to what he did, either by the ful-

ness of his own mind, or the emergency presented by the circumstances around him. His intellectual activity was, in fact, produced by a deep sense of moral duty, impelling him to say that with which his heart was charged, and which the condition of his country and the interests of humanity required should be said. Each effort was, therefore, animated with spiritual life, and aimed at some wise purpose which he had in view. His activity was no restless motion, but the result of deep thought and ardent feeling, which could not be repressed. He regarded himself as called to every work of human blessing which he had the power to perform, and whether it concerned the religious, or political, or social welfare of mankind, he "did it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." It may be wished that he had devoted himself to the composition of some great works, which might have imbodied his chief principles in a more universal form than that in which they now appear. However much better that might have been for his future fame, it cannot be doubted but that the course he took—that of availing himself of the questions agitated around him as the vehicles of those principles—was one to which he was led by an ever-present sense of responsibility; and in following it he sacrificed his own glory to the immediate utility which he effected.

4. A fourth feature in the mental character of Dr. Channing is, the intrepidity with which he carried out the principles he adopted.

He never shrank from consistently and reso-

lutely applying the sentiments he embraced to the utmost extent to which he deemed them capable of application. He never shrank from acting up to the rules of conduct which he recommended. He did this in the face of dangers to character and fame, and influence, and even to person, of no ordinary kind, and under circumstances in which nothing but a faithful devotion to the interests of what he deemed to be truth could have formed the inducement to his conduct.

When a concealment of obnoxious religious opinions might have secured for him a position of universal respect among the churches of America, he boldly declared those opinions—came forward before the rest, voluntarily to declare them—and thus exposed himself to persecution of great severity.

When the mind of the American public was inflamed against the attempts made to expose the abominations of slavery, as existing in some of its States, he stepped forth to brave the public wrath in favour of human liberty; and although he did not entirely approve of the conduct of the Abolitionists, he became the most illustrious champion of the principles of their cause.

When political views were advocated, and political measures projected, which he deemed morally wrong and injurious, though in doing so he had to reprove the great mass of his countrymen, he did not shrink from the general odium which he incurred, but denounced in plain and uncompromising terms the cruel, and ambitious, and despotic, and dishonest, and selfish schemes, which would have

sacrificed truth and righteousness at the shrine of national pride and aggrandisement.

His conduct in all these respects was the exemplification of his own language.

"I call that mind free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers; which calls no man master; which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith; which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come; which receives new truth as an angel from heaven; which, whilst consulting others, inquires still more of the oracle within itself; and uses instruction from abroad not to supersede, but to quicken and exalt its own energies. I call that mind free which protects itself against the usurpations of society; which does not cower to human opinion; which feels itself accountable to a higher tribunal than man's; which respects a higher law than fashion; which respects itself too much to be the slave or tool of the many or the few.*"

5. The only other mental characteristic to which I shall refer as distinctive of this great man, is the moral sympathy by which he was influenced.

The elements of character which I have hitherto noticed, would, of themselves, be reconcilable with a hard and stern disposition, which might pursue its purposes regardless of the charities of life. Such, however, was not by any means the case in this instance. Dr. Channing was as remarkable for the affectionate manner in which he appreciated all that was true and good belonging to those who

* Discourse on *Spiritual Freedom*.

differed from him, as he was for a faithful adherence to his own principles. He rejoiced to point out, in a grateful spirit, the benefits which society has derived from individuals and systems which the indulgence of prejudice would have led him to treat with entire disapprobation; and he has neglected no opportunity of doing justice to the ornaments and benefactors of the world, wherever they may be found. His love to man and the great interests of humanity was superior to any love which he entertained for his own party, or for any purposes with whose advancement he himself had immediately to do. That love showed itself in merciful regards towards all the miserable among men. The poor and the oppressed found in him their readiest and most earnest advocate, nor was the criminal divorced from his pity. The same love appeared in the deep and tender friendships which he cultivated, and which dictated those melting tributes to the memory of his departed associates by which he has endeared them to our hearts. Perhaps the finest passages in his works are those in which these varied affections are displayed. I have described the sympathy to which I am referring as moral sympathy. It was so pre-eminently. For moral beauty in all its forms it seems to have had a more than common affinity, and especially to have connected itself with all that was gentle and kind and benevolent in morality. Hence arose the extraordinary power which the character of Christ appeared to exercise upon his mind, and the elevated views he entertained of the

nature and influence of the love which Christianity regards as the foundation of virtue. We scarcely need to be told that a softness of heart almost feminine belonged to him in his private relations; for goodness, still more than greatness, shines forth in all that he has left to us.

Even the mental intrepidity which I have described in his own language, was by him expressly identified with the sympathy of which I am now speaking. "I call that mind free which sets no bounds to its *love;* which is not imprisoned in itself, or in a sect; which recognises in all human beings the image of God and the rights of his children; which delights in virtue and sympathises with suffering wherever they are seen; which conquers pride, anger, and sloth, and offers itself up a willing victim to the cause of mankind*."

Connecting together the various characteristics I have mentioned, it might almost appear that I have painted my own ideal of a great man. I have not done so, however. I have done no more than simply record the impressions which I have actually derived from Dr. Channing's writings.

I have not referred with any particularity to the eloquence which distinguishes those writings, because eloquence is a form of mental expression, rather than a characteristic of mind itself. The form was, however, in this instance, too remarkable to be passed by unnoticed. The "truest eloquence" has been defined to be "practical reasoning animated by strong emotion;" and that definition

* Discourse on *Spiritual Freedom.*

might stand as a description of the mode in which Channing wrought at once upon the intellect and the heart of those to whom he addressed himself. His reasoning was never confined to cold logical disquisition. It developed deep feeling, as much as sound argument; and when the rational establishment of the point in hand was the main object he had in view, he did not carry his hearer or reader into regions of abstract speculation, but invariably brought his subject home to the common interests of humanity, and the active business of life. There was on the other hand, nothing merely declamatory in his most fervid appeals. A presiding judgment, ever obedient to the strictest laws of mental investigation, gave clearness, and point, and strength, to his freest exhortations; and made them as convincing to the understanding, as they were spirit-stirring.

Like most eloquent men, he had a style of composition in a great measure peculiar to himself—a style in which his thoughts were broken up into separate sentences, instead of proceeding in a continuous flow, and which was eminently distinctive of the character of his mind, being that which is usually adopted under the influence of powerful sensibility. To him that style was but the natural utterance of his soul, and, fashioned as it was by the genius which expressed itself through it, its very peculiarities gave additional force to what he delivered, although when imitated by others, it is as unsightly, and unwieldy, and injurious, as the armour of a giant upon an ordinary man.

II. Permit me now to turn from this review of

character to a notice of some of the principles to the enforcement of which Dr. Channing devoted his life.

I select two points under this head. I will call your attention to the exalted conceptions which he entertained of *humanity*, and to the supreme importance which he attached to *religion*.

1. The writings of Channing were distinguished by the exalted conceptions which he entertained of humanity.

Man, according to his philosophy, constitutes the grand element of that universe of being with which he is connected. The glory with which he is invested is its chief glory; the interests which belong to him are those to which all others should be held as subservient; and his faculties are the great instruments by which the designs of the Creator are wrought out. He not only regarded man as possessing a value and importance with which no other could be compared, but as possessing so supreme a value, and so absorbing an importance, as to render it necessary that every event which may present itself to us—every system which may be devised—every project which may be entertained—every opinion which may be expressed—every question which may be proposed—should be judged of primarily as it stands related to the welfare of humanity. He deemed that the truth with regard to these things—the truth with which we have mainly to do—would be ascertained, and could only be ascertained, when they were viewed in that light.

When he spoke of man in this relation, he did

not, however, as many have done, refer to some abstraction, some general idea, which may be included in that term. He meant by man, *individual man*—man as existing in the person of each one to whom he attributed the honour and worth for which he pleaded.

Nor did he connect that honour and worth with anything accidental, or which was only partially possessed by mankind. He recognised no class distinctions. He put aside all particular instances of superiority as the foundation of the doctrine he taught on this head. The poor, the ignorant, the despised, the wronged, the depraved, the labourer no less than the aristocrat, the slave no less than his master, the child no less than the adult, were exalted by him to the human dignity which it was his purpose to set forth. He stood up against honouring even great men at the expence of the race, and viewed their greatness only as a testimony to the value of universal humanity. "The true view," said he, "of great men is, that they are only examples and manifestations of our common nature, showing what belongs to all souls, though unfolded as yet only in a few. The light which shines from them is, after all, but a faint revelation of the power which is treasured up in every human being. They are not prodigies, not miracles, but natural developments of the human soul. They are, indeed, as men among children; but the children have a principle of growth which leads to manhood*."

* Sermon on *Honour due to all Men.*

He did not, moreover, content himself with vague expressions on the subject of the glory belonging to man—expressions which might be reconciled with any and every philosophy concerning his nature. He clearly pointed out where he thought that glory lay. He placed it in the spiritual power which attaches to man — the power which he can exert upon himself as distinguished from the sensual tendencies and passionate impulses of which he is the subject. He taught that the latter were to be controuled and subdued by the former, and that man rose to the elevation destined for him just so far as he obeyed the authority which his reason and conscience were plainly intended to exercise over all the rest of his nature. The spiritual faculties to which he thus gave supremacy, he also taught were to be placed under the regulation of that sense of right which stands in a relation of supremacy to them. "The sense of duty, the power of discerning and doing right, the moral and religious principle, the inward monitor which speaks in the name of God to the capacity of virtue or excellence—*this* is the great gift of God. We can conceive no greater. In seraph and archangel we can conceive no higher energy than the power of virtue, or the power of forming themselves after the will and moral perfections of God. This power breaks down all barriers between the seraph and the lowest human being; it makes them brethren. Whoever has derived from God this perception, and capacity of rectitude, has a bond of union with the spiritual world stronger than all the ties of nature. He

possesses a principle which, if he is faithful to it, must carry him forward for ever, and ensures to him the improvement and happiness of the highest order of beings. It is this moral power which makes all men essentially equal—which annihilates all the distinctions of this world. Through this the ignorant and the poor may become the greatest of the race, for the greatest is he who is most true to the principle of duty*."

The sentiments I have just quoted show how Dr. Channing considered the welfare and progress of the *individual man* to depend upon himself—how he regarded "self culture," in the high moral sense which he attached to it, to be the means of accomplishing the great purposes of human existence. He applied the very same principle to the welfare and progress of *man in his social and civil capacity.* His social science, his political theories, were based upon the same conviction of the glory belonging to human nature which lay at the foundation of his views of man's individual happiness. Whatever was calculated to destroy or interfere with the spiritual energy by which men work out for themselves a destiny of good, he opposed. Whatever was calculated to uphold or draw forth the intellectual and moral power which mankind possess, giving it unfettered play and unlimited range, he advocated. He taught that the true interest of families, of churches, of trade, of government, of every institution by which men are connected together, was the same moral interest which ought

* Sermon on *Honour due to all Men.*

to regulate all private and personal affairs; and that the great object aimed at in all these departments of life should be the preservation, and establishment, and extension, of the spiritual principles with which that interest is identified. A happy family, with him, was one all whose members mutually acted up to their own sense of truth and goodness. A well ordered church was one all whose component parts were animated by the spiritual vigour which Christianity may inspire into every heart. A prosperous trading community was one in which master and servant, buyer and seller, conducted themselves toward each other in consistency with the moral justice which is applicable to the affairs of commerce. And a good government was one which, while an enlightened morality formed the rule of its own proceedings, gave to all its subjects the equal rights which constitute the platform of morality among themselves.

Therefore was he the advocate of *freedom*—freedom being the only condition on which the spiritual nature of man can exert its strength and accomplish its growth. Freedom in education, the mind and heart being taught to expand themselves to every light of truth. Freedom in church government, every fetter of a human creed being removed from its administration. Freedom in all the transactions of mercantile life, no restrictions in favour of monopoly being permitted. Freedom in the constitution and the laws which relate to national protection.

We find him at one time lifting up his voice

against the love of power which displays itself in conquest. And why? Because the exercise of such power checks and destroys that nobler power by which, mind acting upon mind, and heart upon heart, an empire is established, surer, wider, happier, better far, than a Napoleon had conception of.

We find him at another time denouncing slavery. And why? Not chiefly because of the particular evils of which it is seen and felt to be the source, but because it is in itself an outrage upon the spiritual dignity and a barrier to the moral progress of man.

We find him, again, facing the rage of the mob who would fain put down unpopular opinion by lawless violence. And why? Not only because of the destruction of property, and injury to person, of which they were guilty, but because the very principle of their violence was a violation of the intellectual and moral rights of their enemies.

We find him, once more, carefully balancing the evil and good which belonged to the different organised associations around him, and estimating them as beneficial only so far as they gave occasion to the exercise of spiritual freedom on the part of their members, and pointing out how the very principle of association needed to be guarded and restrained, lest it should produce a tyranny which would be the no less fearful in its despotism because it assumed a voluntary guise.

To such views of humanity as these, I, with my whole heart, subscribe. This identification of human interests, in their personal and associated forms, with

the free moral cultivation of man's spiritual nature, I would enforce upon you. Were I seeking for an instance of the truth of these views, I would not go beyond Dr. Channing himself to find it. He acted upon the principles he recommended. He asserted the independence for which he pleaded. He carried out the spiritual liberty which he endeavoured to promote in others. He worked up to the moral standard he erected; and in his own person he proved that a character formed upon these principles was infinitely more powerful than any other instrumentality which can be employed for human regeneration and blessing. He has done more in his own country, and in this country, for the high and holy causes with which he identified himself, than any array of external machinery could have effected, whether depending upon compulsory or voluntary means, or conducted by civil government or associated bodies of men. He has demonstrated the great lesson he delivered—that the mind of man, individually asserting the native strength with which God has endowed it, is the mightiest force which the whole universe contains.

These views of humanity are not only true and valuable in themselves, but are especially important at this time, concurring as they do with the tendency of events around us, while they shew how that tendency may be most wisely and beneficially fulfilled. Channing was in an eminent degree the prophet of his day. The principles he laid down were those for the clear and powerful utterance of which the course of things had prepared mankind,

and were immediately calculated to direct the efforts and encourage the hopes most natural to the civilised world. To the exact suitability of his teachings to this period of human history he owed his success no less than to the strength of his own character; and we have to bless God that he appeared at once to point out the evils, and to facilitate the acquirement of the benefits, with which the present movement of society is fraught. The debt of obligation between him and society is mutual. We reverence him not only as a great and good man, but as one to whom it will be found that the present crisis of human affairs owes more, as to the clear expression of its wants, and the effective assistance toward obtaining them, than to any other single individual.

2. From this exposition of the views which Channing entertained of Humanity, I proceed to notice the supreme importance which he attached to Religion.

Religion, according to him, constitutes the great means by which the spiritual nature of man may be cultivated toward the perfection to which it is destined. The person of God presents that perfection to us in its absolute form. The relations in which we stand to God suggest the highest obligations to make it the object of our pursuit. The affections which may spring up between us and God, endear those obligations to our hearts as nothing else can. And the connection between the character of God and all natural operations, places the conduct we practise toward him in harmony with the universe around us. Thus he expounded his sentiments on

this point:—"We have a power which cannot stop at what we see and handle, at what exists within the bounds of space and time; which seeks for the infinite uncreated Cause; which cannot rest till it ascend to the eternal all-comprehending Mind. This we call the religious principle, and its grandeur cannot be exaggerated by human language; for it marks out a being destined for higher communion than with the visible universe. To develope this is eminently to educate ourselves. The true idea of God unfolded clearly and livingly within us, and moving us to adore and obey him, and to aspire after-likeness to him, is the noblest growth in human, and, I may add, in celestial natures*." "God is another name for intellectual and moral excellence, and in the knowledge of him our intellectual and moral powers find their element, nutriment, strength, expansion, and happiness. To know God is to attain to the sublimest conception in the universe. To love God is to bind ourselves to a being who is fitted as no other being is, to penetrate and move our whole hearts; in loving whom we exalt ourselves; in loving whom we love the great, the good, the beautiful, and the infinite; and under whose influence the soul unfolds itself as a perennial plant under the cherishing sun†." "Religion is the mightiest agent in human affairs. To this belongs pre-eminently the work of freeing and elevating the mind. All other means are comparatively impotent. It is the only spring by which the crushing weight

* *Self Culture.*

† *The great Purpose of Christianity.*

of sense, of the world, and temptation, can be withstood. It has accomplished more, it has strengthened men to do and suffer more, than all other principles. It can sustain the mind against all other powers. Without God our existence has no support, our life no aim, our improvements no permanence, our best labours no sure and enduring results, our spiritual weakness no power to lean upon, and our noblest aspirations and desires no pledge of being realised in a better state*." The multitude of paragraphs like those I have just quoted to be found in Channing's writings, and the manner in which the great idea they express is interwoven with all his discussions and appeals, is as remarkable as any one thing connected with him. Religion was not only a subject to which he devoted his attention, but it constituted in his mind *the* subject, a correspondence with which was the fulfilment of the true and eternal purposes of our being.

Religion he identified with Christianity. He never contented himself with setting forth the glory of the religious principle alone. The revelation of the gospel with him sustained the same relation to that principle which the facts of nature do to scientific investigation. He was a Christian in the most positive sense of that term. One who not only admired Christianity, but who believed it to be true and divine—who upheld it and proclaimed it as the truth which God himself had made known, in order by its means to satisfy the religious wants of mankind. If there be any part of his works which will

* *Spiritual Freedom.*

live for ever, it is that in which he has vindicated the divinity of the gospel. The arguments he has conducted on that head appear to me to possess singular truth and power. They not only convince the understanding, but they move the heart in favour of Christianity as no others do with which I am acquainted. Theirs is no cold logic; but, exciting the deepest sympathies of the soul, they establish a Christian belief which can only be shaken by injuring the moral feelings of our nature.

Channing was a great champion of the truth of Christianity. He was more. He threw light upon parts of the Christian system by which they are exhibited to us with all the freshness and force of originality. I may venture to say, that never before was the influence of the gospel upon the human mind—" redeeming it and setting it free by cleansing it from evil, breathing into it the love of virtue, calling forth its noblest faculties and affections, enduing it with moral power, and restoring it to order and health "—described in the striking terms in which he has described it. And I may also venture to say, that never was the character of Christ—its truth, and goodness, and power, its blended divinity and humanity, its incomparable elevation and practical utility—exhibited as he has exhibited it. Description and exhibition do not by any means express the work he performed in these and other respects. It was his to unfold and expand.

Bear with me a little while I proceed to declare that the Christianity which he held was, as to all the points of the Trinitarian controversy, *Unitarian* in its character. He believed that God was one,

in person as well as in essence. He believed that Christ came to save men, not by affecting God on their behalf, but by raising them to the likeness of God. He grounded his belief on these heads, not upon mere reasoning, but upon revelation; and it was one of his objects to show that the difference between him and others arose from the stricter adherence on his part to the records of our common faith, and the more devoted attachment to the great purposes of that faith. His Unitarianism was no negative belief, whatever Unitarianism has been in the hands of others.

He was not from the beginning of his ministry a Unitarian. Unitarianism was adopted by him as the result of investigations by which he was led to reject the opinions in which he had been educated. It stood to him in the relation of truth, to the conviction of which he had arrived by painful and laborious research.

There is one thing which strikes me in reading what he has written on this subject more than any other. I may be biassed in this opinion by my own theological views, but the conclusions to which he brought himself seem to me to have been the natural and necessary effect of the superior mental power which he exercised. That power may be distinctly, characteristically, traced in its bearing upon those conclusions. The process of mind which led him to them, was exactly the same process which led him to the more elevated views which he entertained relative to human nature and society. I cannot follow his course of thought without feeling that for him to have adopted other conclusions

would have been a violation of the intellectual principles by which he was invariably influenced. I should not say this of others, even distinguished men, who held similar opinions to his, but I cannot help saying it of him. I have observed that it was one of the tendencies of his mind to concern himself mainly with the principles of a subject, and that the principles he adopted were conceived by him with extraordinary strength and fulness of thought. Guided by the Christian revelation, he brought these characteristics to bear upon such questions as I am now alluding to. He threw his Christianity into the form of principle, and the result was, that he found the notion of the tri-personality of the Divine Being to interfere with the principle of religion as developed in the gospel; and he found the notion of divine satisfaction to interfere with the principle of morality as laid down there. In that form he constantly put the case; and when he had to contend for the personal unity of the Deity, he did so because he identified that doctrine with the interests of piety; and when he had to contend for the exclusively moral influence of the work of Jesus, he did so because he identified that doctrine with the interests of virtue. Whoever will turn to his sermons on these points, will find, howsoever much he may differ from their author, that it was no petty and feeble heresy which led him astray, but that he was carried along in his theological course by the same noble, and exalted, and pure, and extensive, conceptions of the interests with which he had to do, as wrought upon him in all other cases.

I am speaking to some who do not agree with

Dr. Channing in theological opinion. And I say that, at least, a lesson of charity is to be learned by them when they connect the fact of their disagreement with the intellectual and moral character of a man like this. To exclude such an one from the pale of Christianity because he was not what is called orthodox—one whose whole thought, and feeling, and conduct, were imbued with a deeper and loftier Christian spirit than belonged to almost any other of whom we have a record—would be the vilest of all heresies—a heresy which strikes at the root of every moral principle which Christianity appeared to establish. I say, they are bound to go farther than this concession of charity will lead them. They are bound, in spite of their theological differences, to treat with respect and reverence—Christian respect and reverence—a character in which the influence of the religion they possess was so illustriously displayed. They are bound to acknowledge far more than that the Christian name belonged to him; *that* is, indeed, but a little thing to acknowledge—far more than that he was entitled to all the rewards of sincerity; *that* would be too shameless to deny—they are bound to confess that his opinions accomplished in him the highest purposes of Christianity, and that they were Christian in the sense of being able to confer upon those who faithfully hold them, all the spiritual and eternal advantages which the gospel brings to light.

Dr. Channing was a Unitarian. I have another position to advance under this head. He did not leave Unitarianism as he found it. He conferred upon it benefits of no ordinary kind. He has been

the chief means of producing a revolution in the sentiments and conduct of those who profess this form of Christianity, which cannot be passed by in a notice of him from this place. Though the change may relate rather to the mode of administering religious truth, than to the substance of the truth itself, it is both striking and important.

He has given to the expositions of Unitarian doctrine a more evangelical character. He has produced a stricter and more constant reference to the great principles on which the gospel bases those truths which relate to the moral interests of man, as distinguished from an exclusively rational investigation of such truths. Under his influence, what has been frequently called *mere morality*, has given place to the religious considerations which aim at cultivating the whole nature of man in obedience to the affections inspired by the idea of God, so that it may approach to the likeness of God. Under his influence, all the peculiar instrumentalities of Christianity, and especially those which are involved in the character of Jesus Christ himself—instrumentalities whose power lies in the spiritual principles with which they furnish the heart—have risen to an importance which was not previously conceded to them, superseding, in a great measure, arguments of natural utility which appeal only to the understanding.

The philosophical change which he has produced, is little less remarkable than the theological one. The doctrines of Materialism and Necessity, which, in days gone by, gave so much of their own character to Unitarian preaching and writing, now,

mainly I believe, through his influence, give character to them no longer. Whatever may be said in favour of those doctrines, it is felt that it is not by them that the nature of man can be roused to those efforts in which the religious principle displays itself. They who hold these doctrines in their severest form, hold them rather as speculations which may satisfy the thought, than as principles of any practical usefulness. But the change does not stop there. Within the circle in which Dr. Channing has most forcibly operated, these doctrines are now generally acknowledged to afford, at the best, only a partial explanation of the mental facts to which they are applied. The material theory has been succeeded by one which recognises the existence of faculties which, however controuled by matter, have powers and tendencies for which matter cannot account: and the necessity to which man is subjected, is confessed not to absorb the free and independent action of which his spiritual nature makes him capable. Upon what is spiritual and what is free, the strength, and purity, and progress, of humanity—all that gives character and power to the man himself—must depend. A clear perception of this truth has grown up among us, and its effect has been to give a more vital and earnest character to the religious teachings which it has modified, causing them to strike more directly upon the sense of responsibility attaching to man. It is a change for the better. A change which has brought Unitarian teaching, not only into a nearer conformity to human nature, but also into a more exact resemblance to the teaching of him

whose words were "spirit and life." I do not say that Dr. Channing discussed the points to which I have referred in their metaphysical form. He did not do so. In that form he can scarcely be said to have delivered his opinion upon them. It was by practical appeals to the spiritual freedom of man, that he accomplished the work for which I have given him credit—appeals whose truth was manifested by the moral power which they were felt to possess. Nor am I advocating the substitution of one metaphysical theory for another, in connexion with Unitarianism. I advocate a mode of religious action which is independent of all such theories; and I am thankful that, in the present instance, metaphysical speculation is no longer suffered to controul that warm and energetic application of Christian truth to the heart and conscience of mankind which so eminently distinguishes the records of our faith. May the churches upon whom Channing's reforming efforts were most directly brought to bear, continue to "rejoice in the burning and shining light" which arose in his person to guide and bless them.

I have now finished my task. I close my remarks with a deep consciousness of the imperfect manner in which I have fulfilled the work I undertook. It is with no affectation of humility that I say, my description has been altogether beneath the subject. I never once opened Dr. Channing's works for the purpose of extracting the passages I have quoted, without acutely feeling that this was the case. You can test this for yourselves. If anything I have said shall have persuaded you to

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read and study those works, all my wishes on this subject will be accomplished. I have spoken of him in no sectarian spirit I trust; and I desire to accomplish no sectarian object by this concluding recommendation. Whatever your opinions or pursuits may be, you cannot rise from the perusal of his writings without being wiser and better. It is your *duty* to avail yourselves of the advantages which he has put within your reach. A great and good man is the best blessing which God can confer upon the world. It is God's main instrument in regenerating and improving mankind. You are responsible for the use of that blessing. You are responsible for it in this case. This man and his writings were no accidents. The example of the one, and the teaching of the other, are means which God has devised for our mental and moral advancement. May you faithfully and diligently employ those means. I have no doubt but that they will be so employed by others, if not by you, and that countless multitudes, in generations yet unborn, remembering the service which he did to the highest interests of humanity, will "rejoice at his birth."

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